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SUBJECT: Senegal-President Wade announces he will run for a third term

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a September 18, 2009 interview he gave to VOA's French to Africa service, Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade announced that he was going to run for a third term in office. Immediately, opposition leaders derided the decision saying that this was just a ploy by the President to sideline the succession question until he could better position his son, Karim Wade to replace him. End Summary.

Yes he Can

¶2. (SBU) Under Senegal's former constitution there were no term limits for the office of president. Wade was elected in 2000 under that constitution. In 2001, Senegal adopted a new constitution which introduced a limit of two consecutive terms for the presidency and reduced the length of the mandate to five years. However, this was not applied retroactively to Wade's first term because he was elected before the new constitution came into force. For that reason, his first term was seven years and the two consecutive term limit commenced with his second term, which began in 2007. However, in a subsequent amendment the Senegalese National Assembly, at the behest of President Wade, extended the term of office back to seven years. This change was not applied retroactively to Wade's current term, which will be for five years and end in 2012. So, barring another change, the next president will be elected for seven years.

More Changes Afoot?

¶3. (SBU) Another announcement that has the opposition up in arms is the as yet unanswered rumor that the National Assembly is preparing another constitutional amendment to change the election of president from two rounds to a first-past-the-post system. President Wade has so far demurred and is gauging public sentiment as he knows full well that, under the current system, it is unlikely that either he or his chosen heir could win the necessary 50 percent in order to avert the need for a second round during the presidential elections slated for 2012. However, should the constitution be amended, there is a fair chance that a Democratic Party of Senegal (PDS) candidate could win in 2012, especially since the opposition remains hopelessly divided, despite claims to the contrary. On Sunday, September 27, PDS Deputy Amadou Gallo Ndiaye went as far as to tell a gathering of local party leaders in the northern city of Louga that the matter had already been taken care of, as the Assembly had already drafted a law to change the constitution. "It is official the Presidential election will be done in one round," he stated boldly. In response, Ousmane Tanor Dieng, the leader of the Socialist Party, said, "This would be the straw that breaks the camel's back." He characterized the proposition as another example of the backsliding of Senegal's democracy, accusing Wade of trying to rig his re-election.

Why the Announcement?

¶4. (SBU) Ever since he won re-election in 2007, President Wade has

had to face continual calls to reveal who his chosen successor will be. At the same time, his PDS has continued its inexorable disintegration as leading party members such as former Prime Ministers Macky Sall and Idrissa Seck were either ousted or left in disgust at his autocratic and increasingly erratic leadership style. That being said Wade remains the only constant in the maelstrom of Machiavellian political intrigue that surrounds him. As long as he remains in full control of the State's vast patronage apparatus he will be able to keep his satraps in line until such a time he either revamps the PDS or announces a successor.

Comment

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15. (SBU) Rumors of changes to the electoral code in what is an obvious ploy that favors the PDS are disconcerting. What's worse is that, with full control of the National Assembly and a carefully massaged message that changes to the electoral code make fiscal sense, means that Wade's latest maneuvers might actually be enough to persuade the Senegalese electorate that the change is warranted. Meanwhile, the President's announcement that he will run for a third term has opinion makers divided between whether or not he is doing it to calm the political scene down or if he is actually serious. In any event, President Wade continues to exhibit a stubborn resistance to relaxing his seeming stranglehold on the political process. End Comment.

SMITH